

## Introduction

A theme that runs through the chapters in this collection of essays is the importance of listening to students and respecting the knowledge they bring to school from their homes and communities. We honor our students by providing them with curriculum and instruction that fits them. As Dr. Melanie Brice describes in chapter one, a talented teacher can develop students' literacy by encouraging them to utilize what they have learned in their homes and communities, including bringing into the classroom popular culture such as blogs and glogs. This is nothing new. One just has to look at the student writings in publications over the years to see what talented teachers can do. For example, Rose K. Brandt, supervisor of Indian education for the U.S. government's Office of Indian Affairs, in a 1937 book, *The Colored Land: A Navajo Indian Book Written and Illustrated by Navajo Children*, featured student writings. In the 1940s and 1950s high school students at the Haskell and Phoenix boarding schools printed a variety of materials targeted at helping provide curriculum relevant to Indian students interests and needs, including Ruth Underhill's (1953) history *Here Come the Navaho!* and Ann Nolan Clark's (1940) bilingual Navajo-English *Little Herder* series illustrated by Hoke Denetsosie. Both Intermountain Boarding School (see e.g., Taylor & Wride, 2020) and Wingate High School published booklets of student writings in the 1960s and 1970s.

The first community-controlled schools in Navajoland were an outgrowth of the Indian self-determination/tribal sovereignty movement that Melody McCoy and Tom Hopkins write about in this volume, and they produced a variety of culturally relevant curriculum materials for Navajo students. For example, Rough Rock Demonstration School developed dozens of books with Navajo history and stories written in both the Navajo and English languages. Rock Point Community School also produced many books. The best known is *Between Sacred Mountains: Navajo Stories and Lessons from the Land* (Bingham & Bingham, 1982). It also published *Navajo Chapters* (Bingham & Bingham, 1987), *The Navajo Forest* (Bingham & Bingham, 1987), *Navajo Farming* (Bingham & Bingham, 1979), and *Living From Livestock* (Bingham, Lee & Jim, 1984). In the 1970s Ramah Navajo School published a literary magazine of student writing (see figures 1 and 2).

In the United States, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 and Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 made big promises of academic achievement gains as seen in their titles, but these promises have not been fulfilled, especially for American Indian students (*Nation's Report Card*, 2015, 2019). These Acts emphasize the importance of using "evidence based" teaching approaches, however it is important to remember that evidence of student success drawn from studies of curricular and instructional approaches studied in one group of students may or may not apply to another group of students who have different upbringings. One size does not fit all. As African American scholar Dr. Lisa Delpit reminds us, "If the curriculum we use to teach our children does

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not connect in positive ways to the culture young people bring to school, it is doomed to failure” (2012, p. 21). Education is a two-way street, and talented

**Figure 1.** Cover of Ramah Navajo High School’s Literary Magazine from 1975.

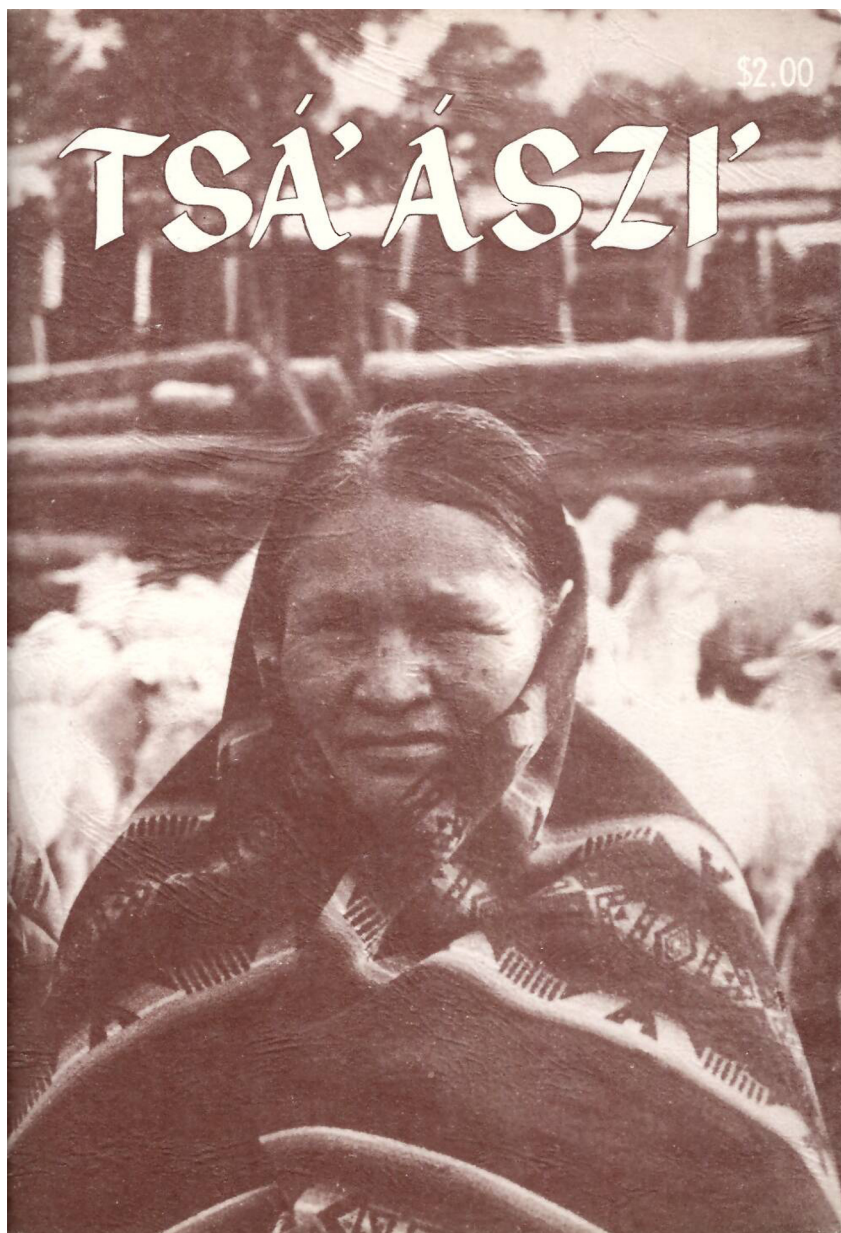


Figure 2: Sample page from *Tsá'Ászi* published in 1975.

# Making A Navajo Sash Belt

by Dorothy Smith, Sara Lee

The sash belt is an important part of our traditional Navajo costume. It has been worn by both men and women for a long time. Though today men wear western styled clothes for everyday wear. Most ladies still wear the traditional long full skirt and blouse, most often of velvet with silver buttons for decoration. The sash is worn on the outside of the full skirt to hold in the blouse. Then a silver concho belt is put over it. In the Summer '74, vol. I, no 3 issue of *Tsá'Ászi* are some pictures of traditional Navajo clothes and on page 59 are people wearing the more common everyday wear.

Traditionally, sashes are red, white, and green but now many different colors are used to match the clothes. Today sashes are also made into purses. Even sash designs are woven rug weaving way to look like sashes. Narrow sashes are also used by boys for head bands and even guitar straps. Sashes are very popular though most other people know only of our silver jewelry and rugs.

The sash belts we make are put up on our rug looms. Since we can get more sashes than rugs on our big looms we put the rug weavings on small portable looms which we can carry back to our dorm rooms after class. This way we can weave when we want to.



Two ways of spinning the commercial yarn tighter so that it is stronger..... using the Navajo spindle and the spinning wheel.

and knowledgeable teachers since the beginning of time have learned from and about their students and tapped into their interests (Cummins, 1992).

The first section of this monograph examines student views on literacy and language and how we can honor students by recognizing and appreciating their knowledge and views. In the first chapter, "Honoring Indigenous Children's Ways of Knowing," Melanie Brice documents how a classroom teacher designed

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a learning environment that facilitated and created spaces for students to construct meaning that honored their diverse ways of knowing and provided ways for them to access the knowledge they brought from home. She discusses how four grade three Indigenous students in an urban Canadian setting brought their cultural ways of knowing to support their literacy learning, more specifically how they used their “funds of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992) to support meaning-making and identity construction. Her study used multiple data-collection methods to provide a rich and holistic description that shows how students’ activities influenced their literacy development and honored their voices. Students used multiliteracies and culture to co-construct and transform their identities. Data analysis revealed the importance of multiliteracies as a means of including diverse voices, texts and cultures in school literacy.

In the second chapter, “Begin with the Familiar: The Value of Family Literacy for American Indians,” Jon Reyhner and Jon Lee describe the importance of family involvement in children’s literacy activities and the U.S. Government’s Bureau of Indian Education’s Family and Child Education (FACE) program. They begin with an overview of the historical perspectives on family literacy and then review research on how the actions of parents and other family members impact how children learn, giving historical examples of how talented culturally sensitive teachers have won students’ support of their efforts to teach reading. The authors emphasize the importance of educators learning about the homes and communities in which their students reside.

In the next chapter, “Think in Navajo”: Reflections from the Field on Reversing Navajo Language Shift in Homes, Schools and Communities,” Vincent Werito examines the role of Navajo (Diné) speakers in perpetuating and sustaining the Navajo language for future generations. Based on work with Navajo language communities as a Navajo language educator, Dr. Werito shares his personal and professional insights about Diné language revitalization efforts in the home, school and community while also drawing from an inquiry project that examined effective practices in Navajo bilingual programs. He highlights the critical role of speakers as advocates for their heritage language in home and community contexts. He concludes with considerations for future practice and research using Diné centered perspectives for Navajo language revitalization as well as their implications for the survival of the Navajo language.

In chapter 4, “In Search of the Missing Navajo Pilot Program: Locating Opportunities and Spaces in Educational Policies for Teaching Native Languages,” Daniel Piper and Cynthia Benally describe how the State of Utah’s dual language immersion (DLI) initiative failed to follow up on the inclusion of Navajo language as one of its options. The authors examined state legislation and policies and provide suggestions on how to create opportunities for Native American language instruction in schools in the absence of federal and state policies for supporting Native languages.

Nest, the chapter entitled “Teaching Chedungun in Chile’s Alto Biobío Community: A Perspective from Pewenche Youth” by Elizabeth Quintrileo presents research on the attitudes of Pewenche youth towards their ancestral language,

Chedungun. She describes how despite efforts by the Pewenche people to support their language, it remains threatened. Her study provides 90 high school students' perspectives towards the maintaining of their culture and language, including finding that the students overwhelmingly voiced support of their ancestral language.

The second section of this monograph looks at the history of efforts to decolonize American Indian education. In its first chapter, "Sovereignty in Action: Tribal Control of Education," Melody McCoy of the Native American Rights Fund provides an overview of the history of American Indian education, focusing on how tribal governments are increasingly exercising their sovereignty and demanding a say in how their children are educated. She describes federal programs supporting the education of Indian students and the rights of parents and tribes to determine their shape. She then discusses the development of tribal education departments and various state initiatives and partnerships recognizing the rights of Indian tribes to be consulted in regard to what educational programs can best serve their children.

In chapter 7, "Transculturation Theory: A Framework for Understanding Tribal Identity and Academic Success," Terry Huffman writes about what he has learned researching American Indian education for over three decades. He discusses cultural discontinuity theory, structural inequality theory, and critical race theory that have proved useful tools for better understanding the complexities of Native American education and describes and gives evidence supporting transculturation theory, which refers to the process by which Native students can journey through mainstream-dominant educational institution while building on their tribal identity and heritage and simultaneously learning the cultural nuances necessary to succeed. During the transculturation process, students come to rely on and expand upon a strong tribal identity to anchor their personal values, direction and goals.

In chapter, 8, "A History of American Indian and Alaska Native Education 1971-79," Tom Hopkins describes his experiences working for the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Education Program and its Indian Education Resources Center. It is a follow-up to his chapter describing his experiences from 1964 to 1970 published in *Honoring Our Teachers* (Hopkins, 2017). He maintains that self-determination was the underlying theme of all U.S. government Indian/Native policies, statutes and activities in the 1970's and describes efforts made to get the BIA out of running schools, as was accomplished in Alaska and Oklahoma.

The last chapter entitled "Teacher Recruitment, Retention and Pedagogical Issues Confronting Indigenous Students and Communities in Northern Saskatchewan Schools" by Richard F. Manning, Larry Steeves, Pamela Osmond-Johnson, Stephanie Furuta and Sheila Carr Stewart focuses on the challenges facing recruiting and retaining the best teachers for Indigenous students.

Finally, upon the retirement of Dr. Willard Sakiestewa Gilbert from the faculty of Northern Arizona University (NAU) after three decades, his co-editors want to thank him for his long service to American Indian education, including his



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co-chairing NAU's American Indian / Indigenous Teacher Education Conferences and serving as president of the National Indian Education Association (2007-2008) and vice-president of the National Association for Bilingual Education.

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